

OLIGONUCLEOTIDES ANTAGONIST FOR HUMAN TUMOR NECROSIS FACTOR α (TNF- α)

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention refers to a group of new oligonucleotides sequences, in particular, a new group of oligonucleotides with inhibiting activity against human tumor necrosis factor α (TNF- α). The target oligonucleotides or aptamer specifically bound to TNF- α was selected from a random oligonucleotides library by SELEX technique. The present invention further relates to derivative sequence, including modified
10 sequences, and the application of the oligonucleotides to manufacture for diagnosis or treatment of the diseases related to TNF- α .

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

15 The human tumor necrosis factor α (hTNF- α) is a multifunctional cytokine secreted by macrophage/monocyte and has wide spectrum of biological activity. It plays important roles in inflammatory reaction, immune regulation, tumor suppression, anti-microorganism and helminth infection. It also plays a central role in cytokine network. When suffering from inflammation, autoimmune disease, allergy, shock, the expression of TNF- α increases by hundreds of thousands to develop inflammation process and exacerbate the disease. As TNF- α is an important virulence factor, it is
20 closely involved in many autoimmune diseases, e.g., rheumatoid arthritis (RA), children multiple rheumatoid arthritis (JRA), pyremia, cardiac infarction, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and diabetes. Therefore, antagonist of TNF- α is important for the treatment of these diseases ("Tumor Necrosis Factor Receptor Family Members in the Immune System", *Immunology*, 1998, 10:423~434).

25 There are many TNF blockade for the treatment of the diseases mentioned above (referring to "Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis: New Therapeutic Approaches with Biological Agents", *Curr Drug Targets Immune Endocr Metabol Disord*, 2001 May; 1 (1): 45-65). For example, Infliximid, (Avakine; ReMicade) manufactured by Johnson & Johnson Ltd., U.S.A. for treating rheumatoid arthritis, and Crohn's disease has
30 already been available in market since November 1998. Infliximide is a chimeric antibody against hTNF- α . The Eternercept (Embrel; Enbrel) for treating rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn's disease, manufactured by Immunex Ltd., U.S.A. has already been available in market since December 1998. Eternercept is a fusion protein of the IgG1 Fc domain and the TNF receptor p75 (Etanercept in rheumatoid arthritis. Expert
35 Opin Pharmacother, 2001, 2(7):1137~1148) (Psoriatic Arthritis: The Role of TNF Inhibition and The Effect of its Inhibition with Etanercept. Clin Exp Rheumatol. 2002 Nov-Dec; 20(6 Supple 28): S116-21). Although these protein drugs provide good therapeutic effect, there are still disadvantages. First, the process of protein preparation is complicated and expensive; secondly, the protein drug has high molecular
40 weight, very difficult to get to the target tissues because of its poor permeability; thirdly, the blood clearance is so low that it is difficult to excrete, which results in its

accumulation in the body and causes side effect; finally, due to the introduction of the exogenous proteins and the change of structure, the proteins have immunogenicity, once repeatedly used, it induces antibody formation. The polypeptide with low molecular weight has good pharmacokinetic characteristics and strong capability of tissue permeability, however, the target molecule is unavailable and the molecule has low affinity, which limits the clinical application (referring to "What Are the Risks of Biologic Therapy in Rheumatoid Arthritis? An Update on Safety by J. Rheumatol, Suppl. 2002 Sep; 65:33-8).

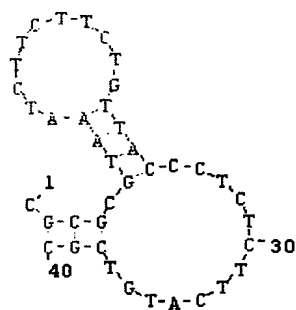
DESCRIPTION

10 To overcome the problem of the prior art, we have screened out a group of oligonucleotides sequences being able to specifically bind to TNF, including DNA sequences (Nos. 1~18) and RNA sequences (Nos. 19~28). The group of oligonucleotides sequences is selected from

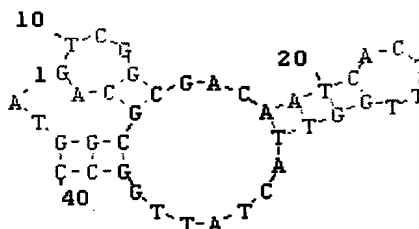
- 15 a) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 1;
- b) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 2;
- c) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 3;
- d) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 4;
- e) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 5;
- f) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 6;
- 20 g) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 7;
- h) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 8;
- i) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 9;
- j) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 10;
- k) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 11;
- 25 l) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 12;
- m) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 13;
- n) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 14;
- o) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 15;
- p) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 16;
- 30 q) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 17;
- r) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 18;
- s) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 19;
- t) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 20;
- u) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 21;
- 35 v) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 22;
- w) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 23;
- x) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 24;
- y) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 25;
- z) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 26;
- 40 aa) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 27; and
- bb) oligonucleotides showed in SEQ No. 28.

Wherein, the sequences Nos. 1-18 are DNA sequences with secondary structures as shown below:

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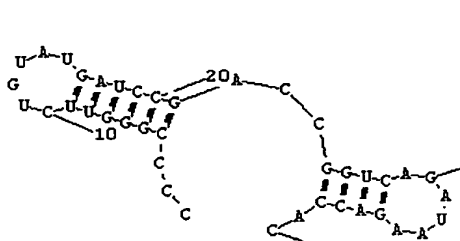
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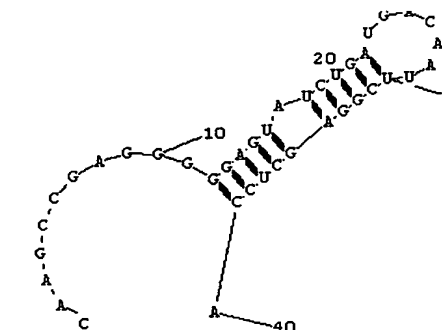
II

The sequences Nos. 19-28 are RNA sequences with secondary structures as shown below:

10



III



IV

15 The oligonucleotide sequence in accordance to the present invention further includes a homologues oligonucleotide sequence that is at least 80% homologues to and functions identical to the oligonucleotide sequence.

The oligonucleotide sequence in accordance to the present invention further includes a truncated oligonucleotide sequence that functions identical or similar to the oligonucleotide sequence.

20 The oligonucleotide sequence in accordance to the present invention further includes a modified oligonucleotide sequence that functions identical to the oligonucleotide sequence.

25 The oligonucleotide sequence in accordance to the present invention further includes a hybridization oligonucleotide sequence that is hybridized with the oligonucleotide sequence under strict condition.

The oligonucleotide sequence in accordance to the present invention further includes a derived oligonucleotide sequence that is derived from the oligonucleotide sequence.

The application of the oligonucleotide sequence in accordance with the present invention to prepare the drugs for diagnosis or therapy of diseases related to TNF- α .

5 The oligonucleotides or aptamers in accordance with the present invention are selected by SELEX technique, which may be a single-stranded RNA, a single-stranded DNA, or a double-stranded DNA. The aptamers can be specifically bound to the target molecules and inhibit their biological effects. Compared with the protein antagonist, the aptamers have advantages of high specificity and affinity, quick penetration to target tissue, rapid plasma clearance, excretion from kidney, and low immunogenicity. The aptamers may be used in vivo repeatedly and maintained high concentration in target
10 tissue. Oligonucleotides can be prepared in vitro and is convenient to be prepared and purified. They do not interact with other protein or antigen and are not prone to induce individual immune response. In addition to those advantages mentioned above, aptamers can be specifically modified in large scale for research and clinical application. Aptamers can be labeled with fluorescent dye, radioactive isotope, and biotin for
15 research purpose. It can also be bound to radioactive nucleotide, cytotoxin, and other toxin in clinical application.

All the protein epitopes are suitable target sites of aptamers. The dissociation constant of the oligonucleotides selected by SELEX technique used as antagonists is 50pM-10nM, which is the same as the binding affinity between target molecule and
20 receptor. As a result, oligonucleotides can compete with receptor in binding to target molecules.

The affinity between aptamers and target molecules is higher than that of ScFv and short peptide expressed by bacteriophage with their target molecules. The molecular weight of aptamers is 8-15KD, which is between polypeptide (1KD) and ScFv (25KD),
25 while the molecular weight of dimeric aptamers is similar to ScFv's.

The oligonucleotides, namely aptamers as mentioned above, can effectively inhibit the cytotoxicity of TNF- α on L929 cells, which shows that aptamers can effectively inhibit the binding of TNF- α to its receptor. Consequently, the aptamers of the present invention can be used to cure the diseases related to increasing TNF- α . The
30 permeability and pharmacokinetics characteristics of aptamers are similar to the macromolecule polypeptide.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 shows the results of electrophoresis of the PCR product from SELEX product, the size of which is about 71bp;

35 FIG. 2 shows the affinity of aptamers with TNF by ELISA; ordinate is OD450 value, abscissa 1-18 represents 18 selected aptamers, 19 is the blank control, 20 is negative control 1 (untreated with nucleic acid), and 21 is negative control 2 (primary oligonucleotides library);

FIG. 3 shows the affinity of aptamers with TNF by Dot-ELISA; the color intensity did not increase any more when the ssDNA was 4 μ g, while no color intensity was
40 detected when the ssDNA was less than 10⁻⁶ μ g;

FIG. 4 shows the L929 cells in different growth conditions; (1) L929 cells in normal condition; (2) L929 cells killed 50% by TNF; (3) L929 cells added with mixture of nucleic acid-TNF; and (3) L929 cells killed 100% by TNF;

FIG. 5 shows the affinity of RNA aptamers selected from 1 to 12 rounds with TNF;

5 FIG. 6 shows the affinity of RNA aptamers with TNF by Dot-blot; RNA binds to TNF, in which Nos.1~10 are 10 RNA sequences being selected, No. 11 is primary library; No. 12 is negative control (untreated with TNF- α);

FIG. 7 shows the results of selected RNA binding to TNF- α by ELISA; Nos. 1~10 are 10 RNA sequences and No. 11 is RNA library;

10 FIG. 8 shows inhibitory effect on 10 unit hTNF- α -mediated cytotoxicity in L929 cells by oligonucleotides in serial dilution; Nos. 1~10 are 10 RNA sequences being selected , No. 11 is premier library, and No. 12 are normal cells;

FIG. 9 shows the binding activity of the truncated RNA aptamers to TNF- α by ELISA; Nos. 1~2 are original and truncated sequences of SEQ No. 20 respectively, Nos.
15 3~4 are from SEQ No. 23, Nos. 5~6 are from SEQ No. 25, and Nos. 7~8 are from SEQ No. 26;

FIG. 10 shows the binding affinity of RNA aptamers truncated and modified from RNA aptamers SEQ No. 25;

FIG. 11 shows the protection of L929 cells by RNA SEQ No. 25 in different
20 dilution concentration against TNF- α ; the TNF is 1 unit and 10 units, respectively;

FIG. 12 shows the result of RNA SEQ No. 25 degraded in 85% mouse serum with PAGE; No. 1 is a DNA marker, Nos. 2-7 are modified aptamers digested for 0, 1, 2, 4, 8, and 16 hours respectively, Nos. 8-13 are unmodified aptamers digested for 0, 1, 2, 4, 8, and 16 hours respectively;

25 FIG. 13 shows arthritis index of a rat RA model treat with RNA SEQ No. 25 and the control (mean arthritis score \pm SEM);

FIG. 14 shows representative photographs of hind limb from a normal rat, RNA SEQ No. 25 -treated rat RA model and no-treatment rat RA model;

FIG. 15 shows pathology study of hind limb joints from a normal rat, RNA SEQ No.
30 25 -treated rat RA model and no-treatment rat RA model; and

FIG. 16 shows detection of IFN- γ producing cells from a normal rat, RNA SEQ No. 25 -treated rat and no-treatment rat RA model by Eli-spot assay.

EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

The following examples are presented to further illustrate the present invention. It is not intended that the present invention be limited in scope by reason of any of the following examples. One skilled in this art should understand that these examples could be modified and varied without deviating from it. These modification and verification should be covered by attached claims.

SELEX technique was employed in selecting oligonucleotide aptamers in the present invention. The term "SELEX" refers to systematic evolution of ligands by exponential enrichment. Single-stranded oligonucleotides have the diversity characteristic both in molecular structure and function, thus, a random library of the single-oligonucleotides is synthesized for binding to the target protein on the membrane. The oligonucleotides bound non-specifically is washed away and then, the oligonucleotides bound specifically was eluted in denatured condition and collected. The oligonucleotides are amplified by PCR for further selection. The high affinity oligonucleotides, namely aptamers that have high affinity with the target proteins, can be selected from the initial library through amplification and selection for many times. In 1990, Tuerk and Gold selected Aptamers of T4 RNA polymerase by SELEX (systematic evolution of ligands by exponential enrichment: RNA Ligands to Bacteriophage T4 DNA Polymerase, Tuerk C. Gold L. Science. Vol. 249, 505-510, 1990). Subsequently, Ellington and Szostak showed great interests in the application of aptamers in scientific research and production. Aptamers soon become a valuable research tool and show great application prospected in the fundamental research, drug selection and clinical diagnosis and therapy (In vitro selection of RNA molecules that bind specific ligands. Nature. 1990 Aug. 30; 346 (6287): 818-22). At present, many kinds of aptamers have come into clinical test phase. For example, drugs are useful for curing cancer and thrombus and inhibiting endometrium hyperplasia and angiogenesis ("Nucleases-resistant Nucleic Acid Ligands to Vascular Permeability Factor/Vascular Endothelial Growth Factor", Chem Biol. 1995 Oct; 2(10): 683-95; "Oligonucleotide Inhibitors of Human Thrombin that Bind Distinct Epitomes", J. Mol Biol. 1997 Oct 10; 272(5): 688-98; "Inhibition of Receptor Binding and VEGF-induced Vascular Permeability Through Interactions Requiring the Exon 7-encoded Domain" J. Biol. Chem, 1998 Aug. 7; 273(32):20556-67).

The single-stranded DNA random library and primers used in SELEX were synthesized by Da Lian Takara Company. Both ends were fixed sequences, 40bp random sequence in the middle: 5'-ggg agg acg atg tta(N40)aag aag act cgc aag a-3', library capacity is 10^{15} - 10^{16} , primer 1: 5'-ggg agg acg atg tta-3', primer 2: 5'-tct tgc gag tct tct t-3', primer 3: 5'-taa tac gac tca cta ta-3', primer 4: 5'-taa tac gac tca cta ta ggg agg acg atg tta-3'. TNF- α was prepared in our laboratory, and T4 In vitro Transcription Kit was purchased from Promega. MLV reverse transcription enzyme was bought from Biolab. Cellulose Nitrate and Acetic filter membrane was bought from Millipore. Oligonucleotides purified reagent were purchased from Qiagen. T vector was bought from Promega. Other reagents were bought from some big reagent companies. The followings were the technical routes for identification and characterization of oligonucleotides.

In accordance with the present invention, a ssDNA oligonucleotide random library is synthesized → an oligonucleotides library is selected by SELEX → the oligonucleotide bound specifically to TNF is amplified → next selection is carried out → a target oligonucleotide sequence is acquired after selection for 12~15 cycles → the sequence is cloned and analyzed → the binding activity to TNF is detected → the biological activity is detected.

Examples 1-4 shown below were carried out to select and identify the DNA aptamers and detect their biological activity.

Examples 5-18 shown below were carried out to select and identify the RNA aptamers and detect their biological activity.

Examples 19-21 shown below were carried out to evaluate the in vivo efficacy of RNA aptamer in rat adjuvant arthritis model.

EXAMPLE 1: Select Aptamers Bound Specifically to TNF in Vitro

Amplify DNA library

The single-stranded DNA library was amplified with primer 1 and primer 2 and then, 1μl of single-stranded DNA product was used for asymmetric PCR amplification. The product was recycled and then, 200μl binding buffer (2 × 1M NaCl, 40mM TrisCl, 2mM MgCl₂) was added. After 5 min denatured at 95°C and 5 min cooled on ice bath, 1μl TNF (1μg/μl) was added and incubation of 1 hour at 37°C was taken, followed with filtration. After washed with PBS, the product was soaked in 300μl wash buffer (10 mM EDTA, 7M Urea binding buffer), and DNA precipitated with ethanol. A next round of selection was performed with 10μl of the obtained solution as template. In last selections, high affinity oligonucleotides were obtained with less TNF. In total, 12 cycles of selection were made.

Clone and Sequence

After 12 cycles of selection, the selected product was bound to PGEM-T vectors (Promega). 18 aptamers (the target oligonucleotides sequence) were obtained after testifying by PCR and sequence. FIG. 1 shows the PCR results. The sequences of the 18 aptamers oligonucleotides are showed in SEQID Nos. 1-18.

EXAMPLE 2: Analysis of Secondary Structure of Aptamers

The lowest energy of the secondary structure and the structures of the 18 aptamers was analyzed and simulated by DNASYS v2.5 software, which showed at least two kinds of specific secondary structure existed. The model I illustrates one structure, which has characteristic of double stem-loop structure. Another structure is illustrated in model II, which has characteristic tertiary stem-loop structure.

EXAMPLE 5: Obtain Double-stranded DNA Library

The single-stranded DNA library was amplified with primer 2: 5'-tct tgc gag tct tct t-3', primer 3: 5' -taa tac gac tca cta ta-3' and primer 4: 5'-taa tac gac tca cta ta ggg agg acg atg tta-3', and then the amplified products were purified with Nucleic acid Purification Kit (Qiagen).

EXAMPLE 6: Obtaining Single-stranded RNA Library by in vitro Transcription

1nmol DNA template, the buffer, T7 RNA polymerase, and Rnase inhibitor were mixed and incubated for 1 hour at 37°C; 1µl RQ1 Dnase was added and then, incubated for 15 min at 37°C; transcriptions were purified with Nucleic acid Purification Kit (Qiagen); PAGE (polyacrylamidedel electrophoresis) was carried out. The result shows that in vitro transcriptions with 71 bases were obtained.

EXAMPLE 7: Obtaining TNF-binding Oligonucleotides from Single-stranded RNA Library

1nmol ssRNA was denatured for 5 min at 95°C and incubated on ice for 5 min; 180µl binding buffer (1 mM MgCl₂, 10 mM DTT in PBS) and 200 pmol TNF were added and incubated for 30 min at 37°C, followed filtration; a membrane was washed with PBS, put into the centrifuge tube, and soaked in 300µl elution buffer (10 mM EDTA, 7M urea binding buffer); RNA was precipitated with ethanol; the RNA product was amplified by RT-PCR to get the double-stranded DNA. The products were processed in vitro transcription after amplification and used in the next round of selection. In the last rounds of selection, a little TNF was added to get oligonucleotides of high affinity with TNF. In total, 12 rounds of selection were made.

EXAMPLE 8: Evaluatiing the Affinity of TNF with RNA Aptamers Obtained from Each Round Selection by ELISA

In vitro transcription was processed with the RT-PCR product obtained from each round of selection and then, the products were labeled with biotin-labeled UTP (a mixture of labeled UTP and unlabeled UTP 1 in 2); the wells of the microplate were coated with 50µl TNF (1µg/ml) and incubated overnight at 4 °C; blocked with 100µl 1% BSA and incubated for 1 hours at 37°C, 50µl biotin-labeled RNA was added and incubated for 1 hour at 37 °C; incubation was washed and TMB and H₂O₂ were added.

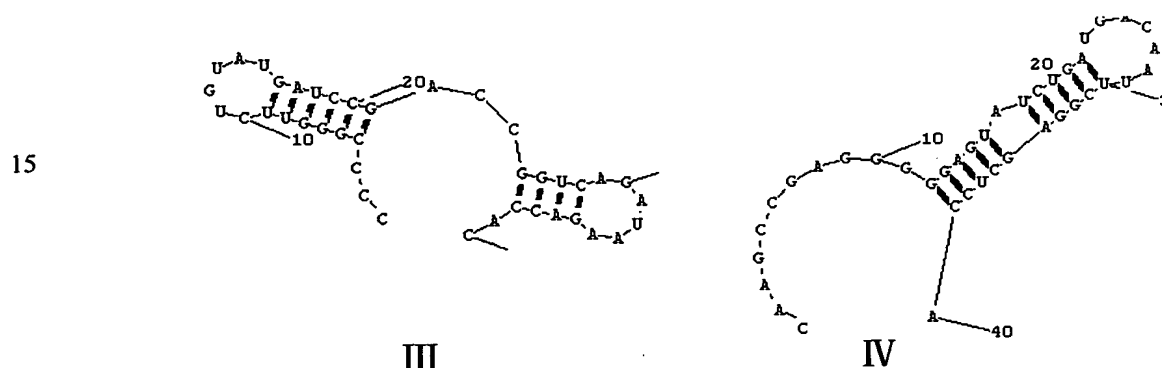
50µl diluted Horseradish Peroxidase conjugated streptavidin was added to each well and incubated for 1 hour at 37 °C, a substrate was added, after developing at room temperature for 10 min, the plate was read at 450 nm wavelength. FIG. 5 shows the results. With more rounds of the selection, the binding activity of the aptamers to TNF rises. After the 12th round of selection, binding activity does not increase.

EXAMPLE 9: Cloning and Sequencing Target Oligonucleotides

The double-strand DNA gotten from the product of the 12th round selection amplified by RT-PCR is combined with pMEG-T vector and then the vector was transferred into *E. coli* DH5 α ; the white colonies were pick out, plasmid was extracted and the positive clones were determined; the double-strand DNA was amplified with the positive clone as the template and then, ssRNA was obtained by in vitro transcription; the binding ability of ssRNA to TNF- α was determined by dot blot; the positive clone was picked out and sequenced. Results are showed in SEQ ID Nos. 19-28. 10 sequences with high affinity to TNF- α were obtained with.

10 EXAMPLE 10: Analyzing Secondary Structure of RNA Aptamers

Two representative secondary structures as shown below were obtained using RNA structure analysis software.



Taking structure III as example, the major character is 5' or 3' single or double stem-loop structure; the other example is structure IV, which character is tertiary stem-loop structure.

EXAMPLE 11: Evaluating Affinity of Oligonucleotides with TNF- α by Dot Blot Hybridization

The oligonucleotides were obtained after 12 rounds of selection. The corresponding oligo-DNA were synthesized and transcribed with biotin labeled UTP and NTP to the oligo-RNA; 10ng biotin-labeled RNA and 100 ng TNF- α were added into 20ul binding buffer and then, incubated for 30 min at 37°C; the sample was spotted onto the cellulose membrane and then blocked with 2% BSA for 1 hour at 37°C; HRP-labeled avidin was added and then diaminobenzidine (DAB) at last. Results are showed in FIG. 6 that demonstrates the 10 RNA aptamers bind to TNF- α to different content, while as the affinity of original RNA library with TNF- α is very low.

EXAMPLE 12: Detecting the Binding activity of Aptamers to TNF by Gel-shift assay

40 bases oligo-RNA obtained from in vitro transcription were denatured as in example 11 for 5 min at 95°C and then, quickly incubated for 5 min on ice bath; 10 μ l binding buffer and 0.2 μ l TNF were added and incubated for 30 min at 37°C in the

water bath; the sample was loaded into 5% PAGE, silver staining was carried out and the result was observed. Because RNA 1-10 binds to TNF, the band of the aptamers was retarded. RNA library does not bind to TNF- α , and there is no gel shift.

EXAMPLE 13: Evaluating Binding Affinity of RNA Aptamers to TNF- α by ELISA

5 The oligo-RNA obtained from in vitro transcription was serially diluted and then the binding activity of oligo-RNA to TNF- α was evaluated by ELISA. FIG. 7 shows the results. 10 RNA aptamers bind to TNF- α to different content, in which 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 bind to TNF- α with higher affinity. Also, the result is still positive when the concentration is 3nm/ml. The RNA library does not bind to TNF- α .

10 **EXAMPLE 14: Inhibition of hTNF- α -mediated cytotoxicity**

100ng RNA aptamers obtained from in vitro transcription was diluted serially with RPMI1640 culture medium containing 10% FBS and 1 μ g/ml Mitomycin, hTNF- α was added with a final concentration of 10 unit and incubated for 2 hour at 37 $^{\circ}$ C; the biological activity of the remnants in vitro of hTNF- α was measured with mouse L929
15 cells; stained with MTT, the OD value was determined at 570nm. FIG. 8 shows inhibitory effect on 10 units hTNF- α -mediated cytotoxicity in L929 cells by oligonucleotides in serial dilution and has dosage relation. 10pM sample can still protect 50% of cells.

EXAMPLE 15: Truncated Oligonucleotides Aptamers

20 In order to reduce the cost of chemistry synthesized aptamers, the selected oligonucleotides aptamers were truncated on the basis of preserving high affinity. Four aptamers SEQ No. 20, 23, 25, and 26, which have better binding activity and biological activity, were picked out and truncated to 30 bp. The stem-loop structures pertinent to biological function were remained, and the following sequences are
25 obtained:

The shortened of SEQ No. 20: GCUUAGCAAACGCACCGCAC
AGGCCCGCGG.

The shortened of SEQ No. 23: CACUCAAUCG AGUGCACGGC
AAAGCUUCCG.

30 The shortened of SEQ No. 25: CCUCAUAGAC UACUGUUAAG CCUCGAGG.

The shortened of SEQ No. 25: AUGCCUAAUC CAACAUCGAG UCUGGUCAU.

The binding activity of the truncated RNA aptamers to TNF- α was measured by ELISA. The results are showed in FIG. 9. Nos. 1~2 are the original and the truncated sequences of SEQ No. 20 respectively, Nos. 3~4 that of SEQ No. 23, Nos. 5~6 that of
35 SEQ No. 25, and Nos. 7~8 that of SEQ No. 26. The results show that the affinity of the truncated aptamers changes somewhat, two of which, SEQ No. 20 and SEQ No. 25, decrease slightly, while the other of which, SEQ No. 23 and SEQ No. 26, decrease obviously compared with the original aptamers.

EXAMPLE 16: Chemical Modification of Oligonucleotides Aptamers

Chemical modification can increase the stability and biological utilization of oligonucleotides aptamers. Modification is an experiential process. After each modification, the oligonucleotides aptamers' affinity and inhibition activity should be measured. The pyrimidine bases of 4 original RNA aptamers were modified with 2-fluorin and 2-amido and were truncated, and then the affinity and inhibition activity was measured. The measure method is the same as that described in examples 13 and 14. FIG. 10 shows the results, demonstrating that the affinity and inhibition activity of RNA aptamers truncated and modified from RNA aptamers SEQ Nos. 20 and 25 remains unchanged.

The affinity activity of the truncated and modified RNA aptamers was measured using ELISA. FIG. 10 shows the result. When the concentration is 3 ng/ml, there is still positive result and apparent dosage relation. The three curves represent RNA aptamers SEQ No. 25, truncated SEQ No. 25 aptamers, amino-modified aptamers, respectively. It shows that the binding affinity of the truncated and modified aptamers keeps unchanged. Further experiment shows that the modified aptamers have the same ability as the original aptamers to inhibit the activity of TNF. It was determined that the inhibitory effect on hTNF- α -mediated cytotoxicity in L929 cells was remained. FIG. 11 shows the result. When adding 1 Unit TNF, 10ng/ml sample can protect the cells from being destroyed and there is obvious dosage relation.

EXAMPLE 17: Stability Test of RNA Aptamers in Serum

500ng unmodified and amino-modified RNA aptamers SEQ No. 25 were taken out and 200 μ l un-inactivated fresh human serum was added respectively. PBS was added until the overall volume is 240 μ l. They were mixed and incubated in water bath at 37 °C. 40ul mixture samples were taken out and digested for 0h, 1h, 2h, 4h, 8h, and 16h, respectively. The hydroxybenzene and chloroform were used for extraction and then 10 μ l of the extract to carry out PAGE was taken out. The silver staining was processed and the result was observed. FIG. 12 shows the result. No. 1 is DNA marker, Nos. 2-7 are modified aptamers digested respectively for 0h, 1h, 2h, 4h, 8h, and 16h, Nos. 8-13 are unmodified aptamers digested respectively for 0h, 1h, 2h, 4h, 8h, and 16h. The results show that amino-modified RNA aptamers have good stability. The half-life of the aptamers in serum is about 8 hours.

EXAMPLE 18: Degradation Test

250ng RNA aptamers SEQ No. 25 was taken out and then RNase was added to a final concentration of 20 μ g/ml, followed incubation in water bath at 37°C. 20 μ l sample was taken out after reaction for different time. Hydroxybenzene and chloroform were added to extract the samples. After purification the silver staining was performed and the result was observed. The results show that the RNA degradation completely after reacting for 1 hour, which demonstrates that the RNA cannot stand the digestion of RNase with a high concentration and testifies that is surely RNA molecule.

EXAMPLE 19: In vivo Study on Rat Arthritis Model

To determine the efficacy of TNF aptamers in vivo, the effects of modified aptamers SEQ No. 25 on the rat arthritis induced by complete Freund's adjuvant (CFA) were studied. Rats arthritis were induced with single intradermal injection of the CFA containing 1 mg of Mycobacterium bovis in the basis of the tail. The aptamer was injected intraperitoneally into rat (1mg/kg) at days 0, 2, 4, 6, and 7-21 post-induction. Control rats received saline or yeast tRNA. Animals were daily scored for clinical signs of RA during period of 22 days. Arthritis was assessed using a scale from 0 to 16 (Griffiths, Eichwald, Martin, Smith & DeWitt, 1981), with each of four paws being scored from 0 to 4 as follows: 0 = no arthritic changes; 1 = edema and/or arthritic nodules on one finger; 2 = edema and/or arthritic nodules on two fingers; 3 = edema and/or arthritic nodules on three-four fingers; and 4 = edema and arthritic nodules on all fingers. Severity was quantified by daily scoring each paw from 0 to 4 (0 = normal and 4 = maximum) based on increasing levels of swelling and periarticular erythema. The sum of the scores for four limbs was calculated as an arthritic index, with a maximum possible score of 16 per rat (front limbs and hind limbs). FIG. 13 shows the results. Experimental rats were treated with modified aptamer on alternate Days 0-22 after CFA injection. Severity of arthritis was significantly lower in aptamer treated rats from day 15 until the end of the study ($P < 0.001$). Limb was photographed on day 22 post-CFA injection. FIG. 14 shows the photographs. Rats treated by aptamer had mild synovitis compared to severe disease in adjuvant arthritis rats control ($P < 0.001$).

EXAMPLE 20: Pathology

All hind limbs were isolated on day 22. For histological analyses, the knee joints were dissected, fixed in a solution of 4% paraformaldehyde in a phosphate-buffered saline (PBS), and decalcified in a phosphate-buffered saline including 10% EDTA (pH 7.4). The samples were then dehydrated through an ethanol series and embedded in a paraffin block. Longitudinal sections through the entire foot/ankle were obtained and mounted on a L-polylysine-coated slide for further study. Each slide was stained with haematoxylin and eosin (H-E) for histological examination. FIG. 15 shows the result. Histologic sections of hind limb joints from adjuvant arthritis rats revealed the cell proliferation of synovium, multiplication of synovial lining cells, edema and pannus formation joint destruction, and neovascularization. The severe structural changes, such as the pannus invasion into the cartilage, the thickened trabecular bones, and the cellular aggregation in subchondral bone region of adjuvant-induced arthritis rat were evidently observed. All of these signs were absent or very mild in aptamer treated rat RA model and normal rats.

EXAMPLE 21: Evaluation of IFN- γ Producing Cells by Eli-spot Assay

Splenic mononuclear cells were obtained from normal rats, aptamer -treated rat RA model and untreated rat RA model. Splenocytes were purified by Ficoll-Hypaque (Pharmacia, Piscataway, NJ) centrifugation and stimulated with PMA for IFN- γ production. Spleen cells are incubated in IFN- γ monoclonal antibody coated PVDF-bottomed-plate. After removal of the cells, bound IFN- γ were revealed by a secondary biotinylated antibody, which was in turn recognized by streptavidin conjugated to alkaline phosphatase. PVDF-bottomed plate was then incubated with

BCIP/NTB substrate. Purple color spots indicate cytokine production cells. FIG. 16 shows the result. The formation of purple spots are due to the IFN- γ secreted locally by individual spleen cells. Splenocytes from normal and aptamer-treated rat RA model produced fewer spots than those from untreated rat model.